

However, the underlying bill would arbitrarily limit eligibility to 10 urban areas total.

This would eliminate the Oxnard's ability to access the funds necessary to prevent and prepare for all types of hazards.

Mr. Chair, the Oxnard metropolitan area has just as much need to protect its citizens from terrorist threats as any other large city in the U.S.

For example, Oxnard is home to Naval Base Ventura County. This strategic military installation supports ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as important D.O.D. weapons testing programs.

The Port of Hueneme—the only deepwater harbor between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area—serves international businesses and ocean carriers from the Pacific Rim and Europe.

The Oxnard coastline is dotted with offshore oil and gas platforms, power plants and chemical facilities.

And Oxnard is located alongside U.S. Highway 101—the only north-south evacuation route on California's Central Coast.

That's why the Department of Homeland Security has granted millions of dollars to the Oxnard UASI over the years.

It's recognized the need to support this community's efforts to: train and equip first responders, improve interoperable communications, establish fusion centers, and protect critical infrastructure.

It knows it must enhance the capacity to respond to all-hazard events, including tsunamis, wildfires, mudslides or earthquakes.

And it understands that investing in local programs, like "Ventura Get Ready," will help ensure the safety and security of our citizens.

Mr. Chair, we all know this is a tough budget environment and that we need to make targeted investments.

But making more than 50 cities ineligible for UASI funds—regardless of threat and vulnerability levels—is shortsighted and wrong.

These communities contain numerous assets, resources and critical infrastructure that are vulnerable to attack and that are tremendously important to the nation.

Now is not the time to eliminate the eligibility of our threatened urban areas from UASI funding.

We cannot lay the entire financial burden of securing our cities on local authorities, first responders, and law enforcement and expect to adequately protect our citizens and make our cities safe.

Let's remove this harmful UASI language from the bill and ensure our cities have the necessary capabilities to safeguard our communities.

Vote "yes" on the bipartisan Clarke-Higgins amendment.

COMMEMORATING AZERBAIJAN'S REPUBLIC DAY AND 20 YEARS OF U.S.-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

HON. JOSEPH R. PITTS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, last week we celebrated Azerbaijan's Republic Day, which commemorates the 93rd anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence from the Russian Em-

pire. Later this year, Azerbaijan will also celebrate the 20th anniversary of its freedom from the Soviet Union and the state of diplomatic relations with the United States.

The U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership is based on shared values and common goals. Over the last 20 years, Azerbaijan has become a key strategic ally of the United States and has helped the United States achieve important security and economic objectives in a complex part of the world.

Azerbaijan supports U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, sending troops and civilian personnel to Afghanistan to serve alongside U.S. troops, as well as training civilian and security officers both in Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Azerbaijan is also a key part of the Northern Distribution Network, which provides ground and naval transit for roughly 25 percent of the Coalition's supplies bound for Afghanistan.

Azerbaijan also plays an important role in strengthening U.S. and European energy independence and is currently expanding its commercial and economic ties with the United States. Azerbaijan, which provides roughly a quarter of Israel's oil, is a secular Muslim country that maintains close friendly ties with Israel.

Please join me in honoring Azerbaijan's 93rd Republic Day and celebrating a healthy U.S.-Azerbaijan relationship.

IN HONOR OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AU PAIR IN AMERICA PROGRAM

HON. JAMES A. HIMES

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mr. HIMES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Au Pair in America Program. Based in Stamford, Connecticut, the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) and its Au Pair in America Program have been leaders in providing young people with exceptional cultural exchange programs.

The Au Pair in America program began in 1986 with the goal of providing young people with unique cultural exchange opportunities. The first authorized sponsor for au pair programs, Au Pair in America has brought more than 87,000 au pairs from over 60 countries to live with an American family, care for children, and pursue educational interests for a year.

On June 9, 2011, the State Department will be hosting a reception in honor of the program's 25th anniversary. I congratulate AIFS and Au Pair in America on the continued success of this educational and cultural program, and extend my best wishes to all the program participants in their work to foster global exchange.

THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO VOTE BY MAIL ACT OF 2011

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Universal Right to Vote

by Mail Act of 2011—a bill to allow any eligible voter to vote by mail in a federal election if he or she chooses to do so.

In my home state of California, voters already have this right. California is one of the twenty-nine states that, along with the District of Columbia, already provide this convenient alternative to voters.

While I love the ritual of going to the polls to vote, I know that getting to the polls on Election Day is often difficult. For some, it's impossible.

That is why I have introduced a bill that builds upon the growing trend of states to bring the polls to the voters. I believe we should try to meet our constituents halfway by increasing access to the electoral process.

What I am proposing is not new or even untested. States ranging from my home state of California, to Wisconsin, to North Carolina, to Maine have already adopted this voter-friendly policy.

With mail voting, citizens can vote from the convenience of their own homes. They will have more time to mull over their choices and make informed decisions, and they will be able to do so on their own terms.

Not surprisingly, studies have shown that some of the biggest supporters of voting by mail are parents, who must schedule time to go to the polls around so many other obligations.

Studies have also indicated that adding the option to vote by mail does not create a partisan advantage for one political party over the other.

Republicans and Democrats both benefit from similar increases in voter turnout when voters are given the choice to mail in their ballots.

In fact, overwhelming support for voting by mail is consistent across nearly every demographic—including age, income level, race, education, employment status and ideology. It is a win-win for all Americans.

After adopting a universal right to vote by mail system in 1978, California saw a thirty percent increase in the use of mail-in ballots.

Other states that have implemented this policy have seen the same degree of support from voters, which is why it is hardly surprising that States offering the option of mail-in ballots often experience greater voter participation.

There is also an extremely low incidence of fraud with voting by mail when compared to other methods of voting.

As the former President of the League of Women Voters of San Diego, I care deeply about the integrity of our electoral system.

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have already proven this option works, and it is safe. It is time to give voters in the remaining states this convenient, secure and affordable alternative.

While I am proud to be from a state where citizens already have this right, I believe democracy works best when all citizens have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard.

Right now, an uneven playing field exists between states that already offer the option of mail-in ballots and states that do not.

When the same election is more accessible to voters in California than it is to voters in other states, the system is unfair.

States that fail to offer this choice stand to compromise their leverage in federal elections by curbing the greatest level of voter participation.

We should follow the lead of over half of our nation's states and ensure a uniformity of rights for all voters.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this effort to strengthen the democratic process and give American voters the choices they deserve.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. RUSS CARNAHAN

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 1, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1617) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Mr. CARNAHAN. Mr. Chair, I rise today in strong support of this amendment, which restores critical funding for local first responders and public safety officials. Specifically, it ensures adequate funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (FIRE) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program (SAFER), which improve the readiness of our nation's heroic firefighters and emergency service providers, and help them protect and serve our local communities.

My home state was recently impacted by the horrific tornados that struck St. Louis and Joplin, Missouri. We saw firsthand the vital role that local first responders play in the wake of horrific disaster—searching for and rescuing survivors, clearing debris, and providing much needed support to a community suffering from heart-wrenching loss and destruction.

FIRE and SAFER Grants help local fire departments equip, train, and maintain their personnel, preparing them to respond to all forms of emergencies, from natural disasters to terrorists attacks. The city of St. Louis recently was awarded a SAFER grant that was instrumental in saving up to 30 firefighter jobs during tough economic times in our city. These programs are vitally important to firefighters serving in large towns, small cities and rural areas across America, as they are able to address the immediate, individualized needs of departments efficiently and effectively.

The underlying bill would dangerously cut funding for the FIRE and SAFER grants by nearly 60 percent compared to FY 2010 and FY 2011, and putting at least 1,600 firefighters' jobs in jeopardy. At a time when local fire departments and other first responders already face significant budgetary challenges, these cuts irresponsibly threaten our economic recovery and the safety of our communities.

Our local firefighters and first responders are the backbone of safe communities across this country, which is why I have consistently advocated for sufficient funding of FIRE and SAFER grants in requests to House appropriators. These brave Americans and their critical work deserve our full support, and I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this amendment.

RECOGNIZING THE FOURTH FIGHTER WING OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

HON. G.K. BUTTERFIELD

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the Fourth Fighter Wing of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base located in Goldsboro, North Carolina in my Congressional district. Today, the Fourth will be honored at the United States Air Force Memorial with the Air Force Historical Foundation's James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle Award. The award recognizes the Fourth's significant contributions to the history of the United States Air Force, as well as its bravery, determination, discipline, esprit de corps and superior joint operational management.

For over five decades the Fourth Fighter Wing has earned a distinguished place in both American aviation history and world military history. This distinction began prior to the United States officially entering World War II with pilots who volunteered to fly as part of the Royal Air Force Eagle Squadrons. Upon entering World War II, these pilots formed the Fourth Fighter Group and set records throughout the War, earning the motto, "Fourth but First." The Fourth continued to contribute to its legacy and Air Force history during the Korean conflict by engaging in the first major all-jet fighter battle in history.

The Fourth Fighter Wing proved to be a superior combat force in Southeast Asia during Vietnam with more than 8,000 combat missions. The Fourth further used their skills during the Persian Gulf War by conducting precision nighttime strikes against Iraqi forces. The Fourth Fighter Wing provided life-saving close air support in Afghanistan during Operation Anaconda, and contributed to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Despite risking their lives daily, the Fourth Fighter Wing has always served selflessly, courageously and with great distinction.

The Fourth Fighter Wing has been a source of great pride for eastern North Carolina for the past 50 years while assigned to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina. I am very proud to see the dedication, sacrifices, and historical contributions of the Fourth Fighter Wing recognized with this award. I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating the Fourth Fighter Wing on receiving the James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle award and offer my sincere appreciation for their service to the United States of America.

ON THE PASSING OF THE HONORABLE DEREK M. HODGE, FORMER LT. GOVERNOR OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

HON. DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN

OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, It is with deep sadness that I rise to pay tribute to a

lifelong friend and political colleague from my district, the U.S. Virgin Islands, our former Lt. Governor and President of the 16th Legislature, the Honorable Derek Michael Hodge who passed away on May 31, 2011 after a lengthy illness.

Mr. Speaker, Derek Michael Hodge is being eulogized as a "man of integrity and enthusiasm, a brilliant attorney and politician," and I can testify that this is true of the man who spent his adult life serving his community in the public and private sector. After higher education at Michigan State University and Georgetown University Law Center, he returned to the Virgin Islands in 1972 and joined his brother's law firm, the legendary Hodge, Sheen and Finch. He entered the world of elective politics in 1974 and became District Chairman of the Democratic Party. He first ran for governor in 1982, and though unsuccessful, it was seen as a win for all of us who worked for him as it gave the Virgin Islands electorate a glimpse of his ideas and his intellect. Never one to give up, he successfully became the top vote getter in the race for the Virgin Islands Legislature in 1984. Although a freshman, his colleagues recognized his political and legal acumen, and elected him President of the 16th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. His skill and his love of the Virgin Islands was recognized by the late Governor Alexander Farrelly and he tapped Derek to be his Lt. Governor, a post that he held for eight years and to which he brought professionalism, innovation, efficiency and accountability. As Lt. Governor, he spearheaded efforts to improve the territory's infrastructure, improving the airport, health care facilities, and hazard mitigation projects. As Lt. Governor, Derek served as the territory's Commissioner of Insurance, Chairman of the Banking Board, Overseer of the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Tax Assessor's Office and Corporations Division. He has been credited with re-establishing the territory's bond rating in the municipal bond market which bolstered the Virgin Islands capital improvement program. Throughout his lifetime, Derek wore many other hats, to include college professor, center on the Virgin Islands national basketball team, and President of the Virgin Islands Bar. His life was one of commitment to his beloved Virgin Islands.

Mr. Speaker, Derek's passing is a personal loss for me. He was "like a big brother," as we grew up together in St. Croix and were political allies and friends who worked on many issues and campaigns together including each other's campaigns for office. I will miss his friendship, his counsel and most of all his sense of humor which could soothe and tickle as well as sting. I extend my condolences to his wife Monique, his children Marisol and Jonathan and the wider circle of his family and many friends. Derek lived with passion and integrity. His days among us were well spent and while we will sorely miss him, there are many memories that will make us smile, laugh and be glad that we are among the fortunate ones whose lives he touched along the way. May he rest in God's comfort and peace.